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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001478

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
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CENTCOM FOR CG CFC-A, CG CJTF-82 POLAD

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TAGS: MCAP MOPS PREL PGOV PTER PHUM AF

SUBJECT: PRT JALALABAD: FALLOUT FROM MILITARY OPERATION IN NANGARHAR;
KARZAI CONCERNED

Classified By: Ambassador William Wood for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On the night of April 28, coalition and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) conducted an operation against a suicide bomb cell in the vicinity of Bati Kot, about 20 miles southeast of Jalalabad. In the course of the operation, four insurgents as well as a woman and teenage girl were killed. Two other girls, a 15 year-old and a three year-old, were injured. The following day between 500-1000 area residents temporarily blocked the highway linking Jalalabad and the border to protest the deaths as well as the evacuation of the two injured females to the U.S. medical facility at the Bagram Airfield (BAF) without the escort of a male relative. Particularly coming against the backdrop of the March 4 incident in Nangahar in which U.S. Marine Special Forces killed 15 civilians and injured 35 others after coming under attack, Governor Sherzai quickly returned to the province to help quell concerns. With the help of his intervention, along with a visit by two village elders to the BAF medical facility, the situation appeared to be calming as of April 30. This incident, and the public affairs fall-out of a separate clash in Shindand District of Herat Province on April 28-29 in which ANA and U.S. forces were involved and in which civilians were allegedly killed, underscore the challenge of addressing the serious security problems facing Afghanistan while minimizing civilian casualties and disruption to the lives of local residents. President Karzai expressed concern that these incidents could affect popular attitudes toward ISAF and the Coalition in a May 2 meeting with his security advisors, the Ambassadors from U.S., EU, NATO and UN SRSG, and COMISAF. Karzai said a fourth day of demonstrations was underway in Jalalabad (today's was peaceful) and called for better coordination before and after military (especially SOF) operations. He assigned MOD Wardak to engage with COMISAF on this matter. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On the evening of April 28 Coalition and Afghan National Security Forces conducted an operation to capture a suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) cell operating in the Bati Kot area in Nangarhar. During the operation, Coalition Forces killed four militants as well as an adult woman and a 15-year old girl. Another 15 year-old girl and a 3 year-old girl were wounded, the former suffering a femur fracture and the latter lacerations to the right arm. The two girls, together with a female relative of the three year-old, were airlifted to the U.S. military hospital at Bagram Airfield (BAF) for

treatment.

TRANSFER OF GIRLS FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT INCITES PROTESTS

¶3. (SBU) On the morning of April 29 between 500 and 1000 area residents blocked the Torkham-Jalalabad highway in Markoh Bazaar in the Shinwar District in response to the incident. The crowd, carrying the bodies of the men killed, chanted anti-American slogans and demanded the immediate return of the two injured girls, even if doing so would result in their deaths. The crowd dispersed around 2 p.m. after Governor Sherzai's representatives arrived with caskets and funds for funeral expenses and convinced the leaders to stop inciting the crowd and displaying the bodies of the men killed in the operation. The Governor, who had been out of the province, returned quickly to deal with the situation, met with the PRT, and intervened with village elders.

¶4. (SBU) The issue of the two girls, particularly the teenager, appeared to be a real flashpoint. The local community was troubled by the prospect of the teenager being treated by male doctors and nurses in a facility also housing male patients without a family member or community leader present. PRT Jalalabad arranged for two elders, a distant relative of the girls, a female medic, an Afghan doctor, and the Commander of TF Spartan to travel to BAF on the evening of the 29th. Once there, the elders were able to establish that the teenager was being kept segregated from other patients and receiving care from female doctors and nurses. This, together with a realization that the complicated treatment for the teenager's leg could not be continued in an Afghan facility and that premature transfer would likely result in permanent deformity instead of the otherwise expected full recovery, the elders agreed that she should remain at BAF until the leg is

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stabilized (3-5 days). They returned to Nangahar the following day, along with the three year-old, who was ready for release. While at BAF, the elders also agreed to try to quiet fears at home regarding the teenager's treatment. Meanwhile, PRT officials located a brother of the 15-year-old and had him airlifted to Bagram.

GOVERNOR SHERZAI SUPPORTIVE OF MILITARY OPERATIONS

¶5. (C) Following the April 30 protests, Governor Sherzai held met with PRT officials and pleaded for the USG to assist Karzai, who Sherzai maintains is losing local support in Nangarhar. On April 30, Governor Sherzai held a press conference defending the actions of the Afghan and ISAF forces as appropriate." The DCM called Governor Sherzai's office to convey thanks for his support. During a smaller demonstration in Jalalabad on May 1, students burned an effigy of President Bush, chanted anti-American slogans and called for President Karzai to step down.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) This incident comes at a time when the PRT had come to believe it had finally "turned the corner" on the March 4 incident in the same area. The PRT's April 29 meeting with Governor Sherzai had actually been pre-arranged to introduce the Navy CSI team that recently arrived to investigate the March 4 shootings and possibly bring criminal charges, emphasizing the USG desire to "do the right thing."

¶7. (C) In Nangahar Province, particularly areas of the south, insurgents are stepping up operations as the weather improves and the poppy harvest winds down. With a long season of hostilities ahead, further incidents cannot be excluded, and we will need to be ready to respond quickly. We have a very constructive partner in Governor Sherzai.

¶8. (C) KARZAI CONCERNED: President Karzai raised the Jalalabad incidents, as well as alleged civilian deaths stemming from April 28-29 clashes in Shindand District of Herat Province involving ANA,

U.S. forces and armed opponents, in a meeting he convened on May 2 with COMISAF Gen. McNeill, Amb. Wood, EU Rep Vendrell, UNAMA SRSG Koenigs and NATO SCR Everts as well as his two vice presidents (Massoud and Khalili), MOD Wardak, MOI Zarar, NSA Rassoul, NDS Saleh and Chief of Staff Daudzai. Karzai noted there was a fourth day of anti-Coalition demonstrations in Jalalabad (today's were peaceful). He expressed concern that further incidents of civilian casualties could turn segments of the Afghan population against ISAF and the Coalition, and called for better advance coordination. Vendrell, Everts and Koenigs echoed this. COMISAF pointed out that the facts of each incident are still in dispute but that coordination mechanisms do exist and the ANA is engaged. Amb. Wood said the real issue appears to be developing an after-action strategy to contain the situation long enough for the real truth to emerge and be disseminated to the population. Karzai assigned MOD Wardak to work with COMISAF on an appropriate "mechanism" to address these issues.

WOOD